

2010

# Into Another

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into another

A Thesis Presented

by

SARAH PURNELL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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MASTERS OF FINE ARTS

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Department of Art, Art History, and Architecture

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A Thesis Presented  
by  
SARAH PURNELL

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# ABSTRACT

into another

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Through a series of paintings, drawings, videos, and large-scale sculptures/installation, I intend to create an environment that explores relationships between the safe and the unsafe place, the sweet and the grotesque, the dream and the reality, and the remembered and the forgotten. I am investigating landscape and how it relates to the body, human relationships, memory, and status of being.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

My current work in painting, drawing, video, sculpture, and installation depicts images of leafless trees, stumps, leaves and a variety of abstracted shapes that shift between chunky tubular figures and flat planes. These ‘figures’ become animated in various ways, spewing from one stump to another or bifurcating into delicate web-like lines that spread into areas of the picture plane. These appropriated ‘nature’ images are used metaphorically to comment upon human relationships, both internal and external, as well as questioning what comprises a ‘complete’ form, or what creates a whole being.

Thinking as an interdisciplinary artist permits me to investigate ideas from multiple points of view and to create richer internal narratives. For example, as I worked simultaneously on the fabric piece and the paintings, the latter began to mimic certain shapes that occurred in the quilted areas of the former. As I created the paintings, I began to understand the important flux between real space and abstracted space in my work, thus changing the way I addressed the fabric sculpture from a large presentation of a stump to a suspended structure that is concurrently expansive and enclosed: abstract and naturalistic. In this way, process and the practice of creating in the studio becomes a vital aspect of how I construct and make meaning from images and objects; it’s a dialogue.

Like a compound word, small words that need to be physically linked when in proximity, my work shifts slightly in meaning when presented in a unified space, like a gallery. When paintings, drawings, and installation inhabit the same space, the space becomes an environment that suggests a dialogue and connection. The work asks the viewer to form relationships between the painting and sculpture to see how patterns and

color are repeated. Because of the linked nature of the work, all the work in the show is unified under the same title. The works in *into another*, explore landscape that transforms experience from one place into another. More than landscape, the ‘tree’ figures begin to evoke images of the human body and narratives begin to expand from the language of landscape into that of human connectedness and separation. And so the narrative shifts from this place, whether physical or emotional, *into another*, from one individual *into another*.

In the following chapters, I will expand on different thematic and conceptual elements of the work discussing the significance of images derived from nature, the amputated figure (the stump, leafless tree, detached leaf), color, abstraction, craft, process, and memory.



Figure 1 : Image from *into another*

## CHAPTER 2

### I HAVE BEEN CLICKING MY HEELS TOGETHER EVER SINCE THE TORNADO (IMAGES OF NATURE)

In May of 2004 a series of tornados ripped through central/southern Indiana. I was living in Indianapolis at the time and my parents lived an hour south in Bloomington, Indiana. The towns between Indianapolis and Bloomington experienced several tornados; this natural wonder changed the way I read the landscape between my home and my parents' home, between my present and my past, between adulthood and childhood.

More than the devastated houses needing reconstruction, I noticed the scarred, fallen trees. They were twisted and turned, permanently leafless, forever stumped and mangled. Over the next several years, as I made my monthly weekend visit to my parents' home, I noticed that the trees affected by the tornados did not evolve through the seasons as other trees would; they were caught in a state of constant trauma, refusing to grow.

Not only were the trees in a continuous state of hopelessness, they marked the pilgrimage to my childhood home with the grim reality of world: disaster happens, we rarely recover fully. Through the series of lonesome drives across central Indiana over the next four years, I began to identify with the landscape. I began to project my own histories onto the countryside between my present and my past.

Since the tornados and the years of driving through the wreckage, I no longer reside in the Midwest; those trees that held the constant reminder of the permanence of catastrophe are no longer a physical presence in my life. However, after leaving my "homeland", those images of forlorn trees, the wounded landscape, and the strange

passage through the land that connected my personal histories together, seemed increasingly important to depict. As I dislocated myself from my past, I became haunted by its landscape.

The body of work for *into another* begins with this narrative, the investigation of landscape and the need to revisit that cluster of trees hidden on Highway 31. The source imagery for the landscape depicted in this work range from the memory of that drive, those figures of trees, that disaster to images taken from the landscape of my present home in New England. The assembling of landscape from a memory and the landscape that I currently inhabit seemed a natural pairing. My initial investment in landscape images began with the parallels I drew between the effects of disaster on nature and the effects of disaster on the individual. As time passed, I became more aware that the way I interpreted the present was skewed by the past. I looked at the landscape of New England with the memory of the Midwest superimposed onto it. This concept stretches farther than an understanding of landscape, but moves into a conversation about how one understand the entirety of the world: landscape, love, family, etc.

In Susan Stewart's book *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Stewart discusses the landscape in terms of the "gigantic". She states that while nature "surrounds" us, we only see it in part rather than a whole.<sup>i</sup> This notion strikes me as another parallel between landscape and the individual or rather the individual's memory and experience. We cannot recall our history/environment/memory as a whole singular unit, but instead we understand it in bits and pieces. The work in *into another*, explores such relationships through the segmented pieces of bark where many sections create a whole and in the depiction of trees, where



many figures collate together to create spatial relationships. Stewart also remarks that “we move through a landscape; it does not move through us”.<sup>ii</sup> I think of how I moved through the landscape between those towns in Indiana, recalling moments of the traumatic landscape and while it was me who passed through that environment, the landscape continued to move through me but only in my memory.

Stewart goes on to describe the differences between the “miniature” and the “gigantic” as the difference between private and public and the contained and the container.<sup>iii</sup> This idea that the gigantic (or landscape) becomes a metaphor for containment, that landscape becomes what holds something; the landscape contains the objects within it, but it also contains memory, the landscape becomes inscribed with a history – the stumps and underdeveloped branches becomes traces of that memory.

Stewart expands upon these parallels between landscape and the individual’s memory, experience, and body, claiming, “the gigantic becomes the explanation for the environment, a figure on the interface between the natural and the human”.<sup>iv</sup> So we project something tangible onto the environment (projecting an “enormous body upon it”), naming it by ways of our anatomy – the river’s mouth, the foothills, the heartland.<sup>v</sup> Because we project ourselves onto landscape, I discovered that creating images derived from remembered landscape became a vehicle for me to discuss the status of being and the human experience, because, as Stewart explains, we ‘project’ ourselves into the landscape.



Figure 2 : Image from *into another*



Figure 3 : Image from *into another*

## CHAPTER 3

### BUT I THINK YOU'RE STILL THERE (THE AMPUTATED AND THE PHANTOM)

A pile of sewn leaves, detached from the tree that gave them life, accumulate in a corner. A quilted bark-like structure is suspended in the air, appearing as a flayed skin of a tree. The paintings reveal images of trees with stubby limbs, half grown or severed. One painting depicts large stumps of trees with fluid-like abstractions flowing or spewing from one stump into another. These images are concerned with the notions of wholeness, detachment, absence, and presence. The representation of amputated leaves and tree limbs alludes to amputation in the human body. The limb that longs experiences the phenomenon of the phantom limb.

The body phantom becomes a metaphor for me to investigate the complex relationships within the self, the self and the other, and absence and presence. Elizabeth Grosz refers to Schilder in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. He notes that in order to understand the experience of the phantom, one must understand the complex nature of the emotional connection others have in relation to their body.<sup>vi</sup> It is this fusion of what is real and what is perceived, the fusion of the body and the mind, the physical and the emotional that interests me.

Grosz then discusses the dual realities that occur in cases of the body phantoms. The patient exists in the liminal space, a space that occupies both sides of a threshold. It is that liminal space between remembering and forgetting, the physical and psychological, that I am investigating in my work. This is articulated through the dual realities in the paintings; strange, abstract, unnatural forms exist in a dense forest, a

seemingly unreal space within a seemingly real space. Moments: a fallen leaf or a broken branch, are frozen in time suggesting the space between attachment and detachment.

In discussion of the amputated human limb, Grosz notes, “the patient is perplexed because he has two simultaneous experiences which are equally real to him: on one hand, the ‘reality’ of the phantom sensation; on the other, the perceptual reality of the experience of the stump”.<sup>vii</sup> An interesting event occurs because the patient has a displaced sensory experience of the limb (that is now missing) and the phantom, but there is also a “denial that the amputation has taken place”.<sup>viii</sup> So, the patient is not living in the present; the phantom patient lives in a liminal space. Descartes used the phantom limb phenomenon to explain that the soul experiences what is in the brain, that the mind is connected to the whole body, not just the brain.<sup>ix</sup>

“The phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion”.<sup>x</sup> Baudrillard also noted, “when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning”.<sup>xi</sup> I am interested in the desire for a ‘complete’ body. I view all people as having an experience of amputation; our mothers are amputated from us, as is our lost loves, the deceased, our past and our former selves.

There are comparisons between the phantom limb and simulation. Baudrillard explains in his essay *Simulacra and Simulation*, “the simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth, it is the truth which conceals that there is none, the simulacrum is true”.<sup>xii</sup> The body simulates the feelings of the lost limb, and while the feeling is only a phantom (a simulation) it creates a reality and a truth. Baudrillard also uses the analogy of the map and the territory. It is the map that creates the territory, with it we would not understand the landscape, “the map engenders the territory”; our understanding of our

bodies is determined by our perception. In regards to mapping, Baudrillard notes “it no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal”. The simulation also exists in a liminal space; “rediscovering an absolute level of the real, is the impossibility of staging and illusion. Illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible”.<sup>xiii</sup> Baudrillard explains a set of statements to examine what is simulation. It is interesting to view these statements in relation to the phantom limb:

“1. It is the reflection of a basic reality” – The phantom initially occurs because the body is filling in gaps of past reality, reflecting what was once a truth.

“2. It masks and perverts a basic reality” – The phantom does not allow the patient to live in the present reality of the missing limb.

“3. It masks the absence of a basic reality” – The absence of a basic reality is the absence of the living limb.

“4. It bears no relation to any reality whatever, it is its own pure simulation”<sup>xiv</sup> – The phantom becomes distorted after time and becomes its own simulation.

In *Two Versions of the Imaginary*, Maurice Blanchot discusses the nature of the image in relationship to the “cadaver”. He notes that the image “wants everything to return to the indifferent depth where nothing is affirmed”. “The image exists after the object, the images follows from it, then we imagine”<sup>xv</sup>, the phantom exists after the living limb, it comes from it and then the patient experiences it. The image and the phantom are connected. “The thing that was there, we grasped it in the living motion of a comprehensive action – and once it has become an image it instantly becomes

ungraspable, non-contemporary, impassive, not the same thing that distanced but that thing is distancing, *the present thing in its absence*, the thing graspable because the ungraspable appearing as something that has disappeared, the return of what does not come back, the strange heart of the distance as the life and unique heart of the thing”.<sup>xvi</sup> Here, Blanchot describes the difference between object and image, the image represents the absence of the object and the image comes the phantom of that object.

In Blanchot’s discussion of the cadaver, he notes “at first sight, the image does not resemble a cadaver, but it could be the strangeness of a cadaver is also the strangeness of the image”.<sup>xvii</sup> The cadaver, like the image (the phantom), is not of this world but it is also not dead. It is something the living person left behind. “The possibility of a world-behind, a return backwards, an indefinite survival, indifferent about which we only know that human reality, when it comes to an end, reconstitutes its presence and proximity”.<sup>xviii</sup> Blanchot continues to discuss the appearance of the “utensil”. He discusses the resemblance and reflection of the utensil. “From the moment we are outside ourselves, in that ecstasy that which is the image – the ‘real’ enters an equivocal realm where there is no longer any limit, or any interval nor moments, and where each thing, absorbed in the void of its reflection, draws near the consciousness, which has allowed itself to be filled up by an anonymous fullness”.<sup>xix</sup> Here Blanchot articulates the complex relationship the viewer has with the image. This relationship can also be compared to the relationship the amputee has with the phantom. ‘Reality’ is suspended and does not have limitations; it is absorbed in the void of its reflection” and is “filled up by an anonymous fullness”<sup>xx</sup> (the fullness of the phantom).

Alongside analysis of imagery relating to the phantom, one can also link the body phantom to a discussion of image making. Blanchot uses the metaphor of the cadaver in relation to the image (the painting, the sculpture). Baudrillard discusses the nature of simulation. While I make connections between simulation and my conceptual interests with images, I also think about the nature of making an image and simulation that takes place when in make a painting or drawing or sew a sculpture. In relation to the phantom limb, the image (the painting, drawing, sculpture) comes from me, an idea manifests itself and then an object is created. It exists outside of me and takes up physical space.



Figure 4 : Image from *into another*



## CHAPTER 4

### IT'S BEEN WEIGHING ME DOWN (ABSTRACTION, BEAUTY, AND COLOR)

The work reveals two worlds. One displaying an illustration of the natural world and the other presenting reality through large abstracted forms sitting flatly atop the landscapes, occasionally weaving back into shallow depth of field. At times, the abstract shapes appear to suffocate their surroundings, devouring the adjacent landscape. The abstract areas oscillate between dangerous uninhabitable spaces that envelope the viewer and a place of respite for the viewer. In this way they are both safe and unsafe places.

I deliberately construct these abstract forms as flat and non-illusionistic. These flat areas of the painting balance the illusionistic forms, which are painted with a variety of brushstrokes, hue, and value. These large shapes of color and white space become matte areas that are partly about the beauty of color, form, and material. In his essay *Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty*, Dave Hickey notes:

“In images...beauty was the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder; and any theory of images that was not grounded in the pleasure of the beholder begged the question of their efficacy and doomed itself to inconsequence.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Perhaps it is because I am discussing uncomfortable subjects like the phantom phenomenon and loss, that I am attracted to forms that translate into beauty. I want my images to incite both pleasure and unease through the beauty of form and color and the abject nature of the images. Beauty then becomes an efficacious tool for me to arouse a discourse within the work.

“If images don’t *do* anything in this culture...if they haven’t *done anything*, then why are we...talking about them? And if they only do things after



we have talked about them, then *they* aren't doing them, *we* are. Therefore, if our criticism inspires to anything beyond soft-sciences, the efficiency of images must be the cause of criticism and not its object. And this...is why I direct your attention to the language of visual affect – to the rhetoric of how things look – to the iconography of desire, in a word, to *beauty!*”<sup>xxii</sup>

While Hickey describes this statement as a “goof”, I am interested in the idea of desire in this statement. The quest for desire – to make a painting, to build something, to have a conversation, to find love – in many ways is what my work is about. It only seems fitting that the work would explore beauty.

Alongside my interest in beauty, I am also engaged in the history and content attached to abstraction. The use and concept of the “flat image” can be seen as one of the tools of modernism that has continued through into postmodernism. David Joselit discusses the relationship modernism and postmodernism have with abstraction in his essay *Notes on Surface: Toward a Genealogy of Flatness*.

“The event [of viewing a painting], as it were, moves from the conscious to the unconscious. To put it schematically, abstraction functions as a machine for recording the psychological response of the artist in order to produce (perhaps dramatically different) psychological responses in the viewer.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

Here Joselit acknowledges abstraction as changing the way the viewer experiences an image into a corporeal experience. Viewing a painting or sculpture becomes an “event” to the viewer and this event transforms from one world (the “conscious”) into another (the “unconscious”). So, Joselit suggests that abstraction is a tool that engages psychological discourse employed by the artist. He also goes on to say:

“We live in a world in which identity is form, and form is identity: proof of this is everywhere, from the evening news to the internet. But art historians persist in dividing the art of form – modernist painting – from the art of identity politics – postmodernism. ....Both ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ art struggle over the same stakes – namely, how to locate subjectivity in the disciplinary world of

late capitalism. One of the primary lessons of modern art has been its paradoxical demonstration of the depth of surfaces. It is a lesson from which we still have much to learn.<sup>xxiv</sup>

I am interested in the connection between form and identity. Joselit argues that abstraction and surface relate to the psychological experience, so it is the form of the image that inspires its identity (in relation to the way the image is perceived). That identity relies on an image's surface – it's flatness or sense of depth. It is Joselit's suggested marriage between modernist and postmodernist concept, which I am examining in my own work through the investigation of abstraction, flatness, and seduction of color and form.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SWEET AND THE CRUDE (THE ILLUSTRATIVE IMAGE)

The landscape in my work is depicted in a stylized fashion alluding to children book illustrations. Historically, the illustration tries to teach the viewer something, whether a nursery rhyme demonstrating how to count or a diagram directing you to the nearest exits. I am interested in the ways in which illustrative images imply a tutorial experience. The viewer is then infused with a strange connection to the images because collective history we have illustration. The work suggests nostalgia through its form and the images unravel themselves displaying the narratives of loss through a media that has been culturally imprinted on our minds. Illustration eases by reminding us of our youth, referencing our most impressionable age. Not to mention the sweetness of form depicted in illustration creates comfort, for instance, no characters in an “in case of emergency” airplane illustration display panic.



Figure 5 : Airplane Pamphlet



Figure 6 : Beatrix Potter, *Peter Rabbit*

Despite the growing number of artists (across many generations) who employ illustrative tactics in their art, such as Robert Gober, Philip Guston, Kiki Smith, Barry McGee, Margaret Kilgallen, and Amy Cutler, there seems to be an ongoing debate

between creating a distinction between art and illustration. My interest in illustration stems mostly from its being ingrained in our culture. In particular, in how illustration uses simplification, signification, and deep, empathic narrative.

“And so if the aesthetic realm is not simply an autonomous sphere of passing fads and aesthetic tics, but is somewhat more intertwined with what is sometimes called ‘everyday life’”<sup>xxv</sup>

It is the interaction between art and the “everyday life”, which Laura Kipnis discusses in her essay *Repossessing Popular Culture*, that I am investigating in my work. I am appropriating the tactics of vernacular illustration in my paintings, sculptures, and drawings. I use illustration to both soothe the viewer and nod toward a personal narrative. The disruption of nostalgia (the sweet) and the uneasy or the intangible is part of the incongruity of “everyday life”.

“When I first started painting seriously, I used to look at a lot of typography from the fifteenth and sixteenth century. I was interested in manuscript painting and lettering that is on the manuscripts, and the color of the page, and the color of the inks they used... The imagery is really kind of simple and graphic and descriptive of what was natural in the life of the people... My painting still, today, is very flat, I think part of the reason is that often in books that show descriptive plants and animals, the images tend to be very flat. ...American craft is like that too...And also the painting you see on store fronts, where handmade signs also tend to be very flat.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Here, Margaret Kilgallen describes the influence of the everyday and the notion of the book and illustration. She is connecting historical usage of illustration in American craft to illustration in the urban landscape of the Bay Area. I am creating similar connections between children’s book illustration and larger personal history, which contains both inclusive and exclusive narratives.



## CHAPTER 6

### WE ARE SAFE, I THINK... (INSIDE / OUTSIDE)

Thus far, I have framed my work in contexts of vernacular illustration, landscape, abstraction, and the phantom phenomenon. Another concept embedded with my work is that of enclosed and expansive space, the inside and the outside, the safe and unsafe place. The forest engulfs the viewer, expanding into an infinite space. In this way it is both cradling and alienating the viewer; it becomes a safe and unsafe place. This is exemplified, as I noted earlier, in the formal relationship between the all-consuming quality of the abstract forms and the way in which they become resting places for the viewer. The relationship between the safe and unsafe is explored in both the vastness of dense forest, the density that turns into the claustrophobic space, and in the relationships between the abstract and the natural.

“Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides. ...we absorb a mixture of being and nothingness. The center of ‘being-there’ wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, which exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility.

...The fear does not come from the outside. Nor is it composed of old memories. It has no past, no physiology. Nothing in common, either, with having one’s breath taken away. Here fear is being itself. Where can one flee, where find refuge? In what shelter can one take refuge? Space is nothing but a ‘horrible outside-inside.’”<sup>xxvii</sup>

Gaston Bachelard begins his discussion of inside/outside in his book *The Poetics of Space*, as a representation of “yes and no” and “positive and negative”.<sup>xxviii</sup> He then begins to discuss inside/outside in more fluid terms by highlighting the flux between inside/outside as transforming into one another, “ready to be reversed, to exchange their

hostility”.<sup>xxix</sup> My work discusses the ineffable transition between the inside and the outside in terms of a safe and unsafe place. The abstract forms simultaneously create visual comfort in the paintings while being foreboding and obscuring how we interpret space. The fabric installation of flayed tree bark resonates as playful and sweet because of the tactility of the material while simultaneously creeping into the viewer’s perceptual space. These images of nature expand and contract, embracing and exposing the viewer.

## CHAPTER 7

### GETTING IT TOGETHER (PROCESS AND CRAFT)

My studio practice involves hours hunched over a sewing machine, making painted marks on surfaces, or sometimes it's me just staring at a blank sheet of paper thinking of the next graphite mark I will make and what the mark will mean. This dance between materials and processes and the tactility of materials is large part of my research. The evidence of the human hand, in all of its imperfections, is present in my work through sewn lines that may waver or a mark on a painting that shifts subtly in color or texture. Margaret Kilgallen said the following of the "handmade" in an interview with *PBS Art 21*:

"I like things that are handmade and I like to see people's hand in the world, anywhere in the world; it doesn't matter to me where it is. And in my own work, I do everything my hand. I don't project or use anything mechanical, because even though I do spend a lot of time trying to perfect my line work and my hand, my hand will always be imperfect because I am human. And I think it's the part that's off that's interesting, that even if I'm doing really big letters and I spend a lot of time going over the line and over the line and trying to make it strait, I'll never be able to make it strait. From a distance it might look strait, but when you get close up, you can always see the line waver. And that's where the beauty is."<sup>xxx</sup>

Kilgallen's strange illustrative narratives derived from nature and urban culture and her use of color and materials are of great interest to my own practice. As Kilgallen notes, no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible for the human hand to create a perfectly strait line and yet we try. My addition to her statement would be that it is the quest for perfecting a line that will never be perfect which is beautiful; in a way the hopeless pursuit of perfection is the ritual of painting.



Alongside creating paintings, sewing and craft are a large part of my work. The desire to create environments that coexist with the paintings began with my interest in further investigating space and interaction. In order to create such environments and objects I began sewing using bed sheets and fabric foraged from thrift stores. Both the materials and my methodologies reference domestic life. The act of sewing also becomes in many ways the act of suturing or healing. As I sit at my sewing machine I draw upon the history of women's labor, the work of the feminist artist of the 1970s, contemporary DIY culture, and conversations I have had with loved ones ranging from childhood to present moments. These thoughts and histories become embedded in the work.

I am interested in the labor of making and the desire for one not to be idle. The idea of a mother or grandmother hand-sewing a quilt for a family member is quite beautiful. The quilt is made to keep one warm, but is also made in memory of that person. As the maker sews, she is reminded of whom she is making it for, those memories become woven within the fabric. Hung and Magliaro, editors of the book *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art*, refer to Janice Jefferies's introduction to the exhibit "Boys Who Sew" concerning the meaning of the phrase "to craft":

"As a verb though, 'to craft' seemingly means to participate in some small scale process. This implies several things. First, it affirms the results of involved work. This is not some kind of detached activity...to craft is to care...[It] implies working on a personal scale – acting locally in reaction to anonymous, globalized, industrial production...It may yet involve the skilled hand. Hands feel, they probe, they practice."<sup>xxxix</sup>

This contemporary context for craft is quite different from the artists of the 1970s whose work was driven by political content; instead, many artist are using craft as a means to discuss personal experience. Shu Hung and Joseph Magliaro discuss this in their book:

“These artists depict their experiences using their most immediate and fine-tuned tools – their hands. Art is engaged as a process rather than a means to an end, and there is a palpable sense of attachment to the materials and methods that are employed. In many cases, the techniques they use have been passed down to them by their mothers and other close relatives, lending them a sentimental importance.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

While my work does not come from a place of sentimental family tradition, it is the collective tradition of sewing and the metaphor of the sewn mark that I am invested in. It is also the act of making that becomes important to my concept, the time consumption, the process, the decisions that seems to come natural – like instinct – when creating something with my hands.



Figure 8 : Image from *into another*

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

Because of the site-specific nature of the sculpture, it was not until the installation at Herter Gallery that I was able to see the sculpture manifest in its totality. For months I have been making segments of sewn bark that have sat in piles in my studio, been tacked on the wall, and have hung on a tree-like armature which I had built. To say the least, the sculpture has gone through many changes in the last months. The final decision of the sculpture's presentation was suspending the sculpture, which alluded to flayed skin, the absence of the body, abstract space, along with appearance of natural formations like caves or forests. Because of the decision to hang the sculpture, I knew that assembling the piece would need to take place in the gallery. I organized the piles according to size and color, assembled large pieces together, suspended them from the ceiling, and added new pieces to unify the different sections. Many of the decisions I made, were in reaction to space in the gallery.

Along with the excitement of seeing the sculpture for the first time, I was excited to see how the paintings, the sculptures, and video would react to one another in the space. The paintings became smaller, more gem-like in the space, especially compared the gigantic quality of the sculpture. I could see the repetition of shapes and color in the paintings, sculpture and video. The pieces began to inform one another, for instance the video implied movement in the paintings and the sculpture that would otherwise be static. A dialogue between the work took place.

At the opening along with the presentation of my work, a collaborative performance took place within the bark sculpture. I worked with a violinist named Eve

Boltex, who designed a piece of music to fit the space while I designed a piece of clothing/sculpture for her to wear. The dress began to take on many of the colors and patterns as the paintings and had elements of the sewn leaves on it. I was interested in conversation that takes place in a collaboration. I also was interested in the way sound would change the sensory experience of the show. I did not film the event because I wanted it to either remain an unknown or a memory.

Because of the isolated nature of traditional studio practice and because my work does talk about concepts of longing and togetherness/separateness, it seems natural that there is a flux between working in isolation (making paintings) and working with other artists. For example, the bark sculpture was much too large for me to hang alone and so after I had assembled the sections together, it was through the help of others that it became suspended. After the structure was hung, the pieces would have to be stitched together and the pins would have to come out. This task became much like a sewing bee, or quilter's circle; a half dozen friends came to help sew the pieces together. This notion of togetherness and separateness is both in my concept and my process. This idea became solidified during the installation process.

Assembling and organizing my work, processes, and concepts for this show was really important for my growth as an artist. It was through sustained involvement with a project that I was able to push concepts concerning nature, the body, and human relationships. I realized how crucial process is to my work along with understanding the richness of the landscape iconography. Andre Marchand said the following of Paul Klee:

"In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me...I was there, listening...I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want

to penetrate it...I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out".<sup>xxxiii</sup>

I think about this quote in relation to my investigation with landscape, human existence, and my studio practices. I become “buried” in landscapes, in my memory, in losses, in loved ones. My studio practice is the reaction to the way we become affected by history, by memory, by landscape, and by one another.



Figure 9 : Image from *into another*



Figure 10 : Image from *into another*

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The panels for the paintings are constructed with poplar and luan board, which is primed with *liquitex* brand gesso. I begin the under-paintings using *liquitex* brand acrylic paint and gesso. After those light washes, I build up the surface slowing using *shiva* brand casein paint. There are areas of the painting that contain graphite marks.

The sculptures are sewn using fabric from thrift stores and craft stores, it is mostly cotton. I use fiber-fill and whatever thread is on sale at the fabric store. For these works it is important that my materials are easy accessible. I use a *Kenmore* brand sewing machine.

The video was created by using a *Cannon* HD video camera and edited in *Final Cut PRO*.

# FLOOR PLAN

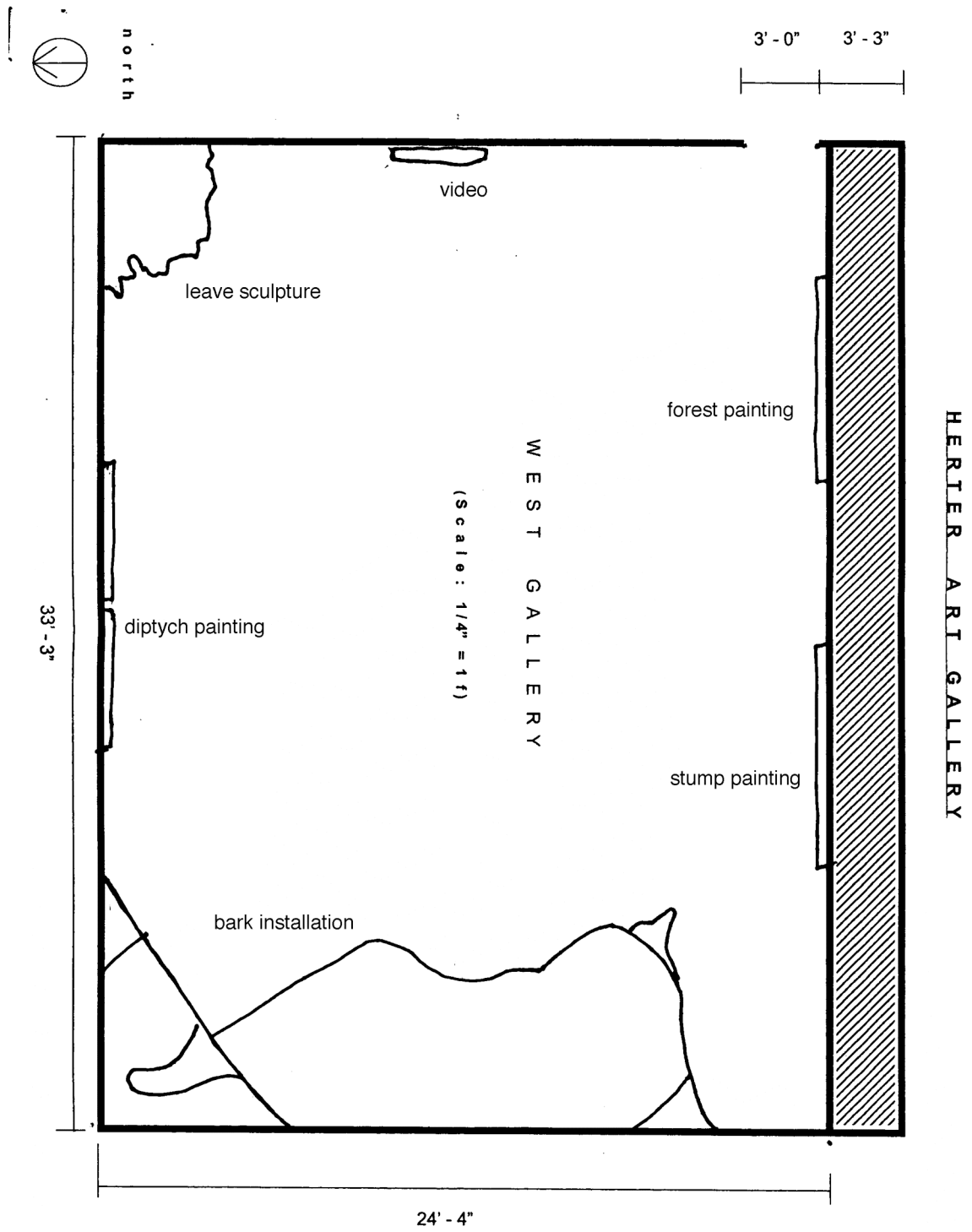


Figure 11 : Floor Plan

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PHOTO OF ARTIST AT WORK



## IMAGE IDENTIFICATION SHEET

1. Image from *into another*, 4'x5', casein on luan board
2. Image from *into another*, 4'x5', casein on luan board
3. Image from *into another*, detail of painting
4. Image from *into another*, detail of painting
5. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
6. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
7. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
8. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
9. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
10. Image from *into another*, sculpture installation, fabric
11. Image from *into another*, installation shot
12. Image from *into another*, installation shot

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Stewart, Susan. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Duke University Press, Durham and London. 1993. 71.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vi</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1994. 67.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid. 72.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. 72.
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid. 63.
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid. 73.
- <sup>xi</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations". Selected writings. Stanford University Press, Stanford. 1988. 166.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid. 166.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid. 169.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> Blanchot, Maurice. "Two Versions of the Imaginary". The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Essays and Fiction. Barrytown/Station Hill Press. 1999. 417.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid. 418.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid. 419.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid. 420.
- <sup>xix</sup> Ibid. 425.
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Hickey, Dave. "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty". The Invisible Dragon. Art Issues Press/Foundation for Advanced Critical Studies. 1993. 11.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ibid. 12.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Kocur, Zoya and Leung, Simon. Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA. 2005. 293.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid. 306.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Ibid. 372.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Piranio, Michelle. Margaret Kilgallen: In the Sweet Bye and Bye. Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, Los Angeles. 2005. 122.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places. Beacon Press, Boston, MA. 1994. 217-18.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid. 211.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Ibid. 218.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Piranio, Michelle. Margaret Kilgallen: In the Sweet Bye and Bye. Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, Los Angeles. 2005. 123.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Hung, Shu and Magliaro, Joseph. By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art. Princeton Architectural Press, New York. 2007. 12.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid. 13.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Johnson, Galen A. The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting. Northwestern University Press. 1994. 129.